

Message Text

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ACTION AF-08

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C O N F I D E N T I A L TANANARIVE 1378

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, KN, KS, US, MA

SUBJECT: REACTIONS TO PANMUNJOM INCIDENT

REFS: (A) TANANARIVE 1344, (B) STATE 211862

SUMMARY. REPORTING OF INCIDENT IN MADAGASCAR WAS SPARSE AND MOSTLY FACTUAL. GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS HAD NOT COMMENTED UNTIL AUGUST 27 WHEN PRESIDENT RATSIRAKA, RECEIVING CREDENTIALS OF NEW NORTH KOREAN AMBASSADOR, DENOUNCED US PROVOCATIONS AT PANMUNJOM. WE BELIEVE GENERAL DISINTEREST REFLECTS (A) MALAGASY PREOCCUPATION WITH NEW GOVERNMENT, ANNOUNCED AUGUST 20; (B) FEELING THAT FACTS SHOW THAT US MILITARY WERE VICTIMS OF AN UNFORTUNATE "ACCIDENT" RATHER THAN VICTIMS OF NORTH KOREAN MACHINATIONS; AND (C) NORMAL MALAGASY INCLINATION TO UNDERPLAY BRUTALITY. ACTION REQUESTED RE POSSIBLE REPLY TO RATSIRAKA'S STATEMENT. END SUMMARY.

1. UNTIL TODAY (AUGUST 27) GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS HAD NOT COMMENTED PUBLICLY OR PRIVATELY ABOUT INCIDENT. WHEN EMBOFFS MET WITH FOREIGN MINISTRY OFFICIALS (BEFORE RECEIPT REF (B)) IN ORDER TO REVIEW COLOMBO CONFERENCE, MENTION WAS MADE OF NORTH KOREAN ROLE AT COLOMBO BUT AT NO TIME DID
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OFFICIALS REFER TO PANMUNJOM INCIDENT. HOWEVER, PRESIDENT

RATSIRAKA RECEIVED NEW NORTH KOREAN AMBASSADOR TODAY AND ACCORDING TO RADIO MADAGASCAR, USED OCCASION TO DENOUNCE "IMPERIALISTIC MANEUVERS... PARTICULARLY THE RECENT AMERICAN PROVOCATION AT PANMUNJOM WHICH MIGHT HAVE INCALCULABLE CONSEQUENCES AND EVEN BRING ABOUT THIRD WORLD WAR."

2. WITH ONE EXCEPTION, MADAGASCAR'S NEWSPAPERS WHICH REPORTED PANMUNJOM INCIDENT (ONLY HALF OF THEM DID) DID SO FACTUALLY AND IN SOME CASES GAVE MORE SPACE TO US/ROK POINT OF VIEW BECAUSE PRESS SERVICE REPORTING OF OUR SIDE WAS MORE EXTENSIVE. ONLY EXCEPTION WAS SMALL NEWSPAPER BASY VAVA WHICH USED TO BE MAJOR ORGAN OF EX-PRESIDENT TSIRANANA'S SOCIALIST PARTY. BASY VAVA IS NOW INDEPENDENT AND HAS LATELY PUBLISHED SEVERAL ANTI-AMERICAN PIECES, EVEN THOUGH IT IS NOT AFFILIATED WITH GDRM OR WITH PARTIES WHICH SUPPORT GDRM. IN CONNECTION WITH PANMUNJOM INCIDENT, BASY VAVA FIRST CASTIGATED OTHER MALAGASY JOURNALISTS FOR BEING PAID BY US AND FOR RECEIVING TRIPS TO US, AND IT THEN SUGGESTED THAT, AS A SIGN OF SOLIDARITY WITH NORTH KOREA, MADAGASCAR SHOULD BREAK RELATIONS WITH US.

3. RADIO MADAGASCAR (EARLIER RTM BROADCASTS WERE REPORTED REF A) PULLED IN ITS HORNS AND EMPHASIZED, IN BROADCASTS OF AUGUST 23 AND 25, THE APPARENT CONCILIATION BETWEEN THE TWO SIDES. HOWEVER, RTM CONTINUED TO PLACE CONSIDERABLE EMPHASIS ON US TROOPS BEING PLACED ON ALERT, ACTIVITIES OF CARRIER MIDWAY, AND PRACTICE RUNS OF B-52S ("THOSE REMAINING BOMBERS NOT DESTROYED IN VIET-NAM"). RTM ALSO EDITORIALIZED THAT US SHOW OF FORCE WAS PROMPTED BY US ELECTION CAMPAIGN SINCE PRESIDENT FORD WANTS TO SHOW FIRMNESS.

4. COMMENT: OVERALL, MADAGASCAR DID NOT PAY MUCH ATTENTION TO PANMUNJOM INCIDENT. RADIO MADAGASCAR AT FIRST TENDED TO INCLUDE SOME PRO-NORTH KOREAN DISTORTIONS OF THE INCIDENT BUT THEN APPARENTLY RAN OUT OF SUPPORTIVE MATERIAL. AS FACTS WHICH EMERGED TENDED TO SUPPORT US SIDE, IT IS LIKELY THAT INCIDENT WAS SOMEWHAT EMBARRASSING TO MALAGASY, OCCURRING AT END OF COLOMBO CONFERENCE AT WHICH MADAGASCAR (AMONG OTHERS) HEARTILY ENDORSED NORTH KOREA'S EFFORTS.
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5. IT IS NOTEWORTHY THAT NONE OF PRO-GDRM NEWSPAPERS OR RTM SEIZED ON INCIDENT TO PROVIDE NORMAL (FOR MADAGASCAR) ANTI-CAPITALIST, ANTI-IMPERIALIST PROPAGANDA, ALTHOUGH THIS MAY CHANGE AS RESULT OF RATSIRAKA'S STATEMENT TODAY. SINCE NEW GOVERNMENT WAS ANNOUNCED AUGUST 20, PRECEDED BY TWO WEEKS OF SPECULATION, MOST MALAGASY WERE MORE INTERESTED IN DOMESTIC DEVELOPMENTS AT TIME INCIDENT OCCURRED. WE HAVE

ALSO HEARD COMMENTS THAT, AS FACTS OF CASE DEVELOPED, MALAGASY WERE INCLINED TO CONSIDER THAT INCIDENT WAS CAUSED BY "ACCIDENT" ON PART OF NORTH KOREANS RATHER THAN BY THEIR MACHINATIONS. MOREOVER, OBVIOUS BRUTALITY OFFENDED GENERALLY NON-VIOLENT MALAGASY WHO TEND TO SHUN SUCH DISCUSSIONS, NOTWITHSTANDING EXTENSIVE REPORTING OF RECENT RACIAL VIOLENCE IN SOUTH AFRICA. END COMMENT.

6. ACTION REQUESTED: DOES DEPARTMENT WISH US TO RESPOND TO RATSIRAKA'S STATEMENT? IF SO, (A) WOULD DEPARTMENT PREFER THAT WE SEND DIPLOMATIC NOTE, OR MAKE STATEMENT TO PRESS, OR BOTH; AND (B) WILL DEPARTMENT FURNISH ADDITIONAL INFORMATION REGARDING INCIDENT?
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